

RAJENDRA CHOLA'S EXPEDITION TO MALDIVES AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN THE MARITIME CONTEXT

K. V. Ramakrishna Rao

Rajaraja's conquest of 12,000 Ancient Islands of Three Oceans: The Rajaraja inscription mentions that he conquered "முந்திர்ப் பழந்திவு பன்னிராயிரம் / Munnirp pazhantivu pannirayiram," 12,000 ancient islands of three waters, i.e, oceans. These islands were located southwest of Cheranadu and identified as "Malattivu" / Maldives. Tamil literature has been consistently referring to "one old island group / archipelago" located in the Southern direction on the ocean. Agastya Sutra¹ referred to it as "கன்னித் தென்கரைக் கடற்பழந்திபம்", i.e, an old fresh group of islands, dwipa or archipelago situated in South on the Ocean. Deivacilaiyar, a commentator of Tolkappiyam recorded that these ancient islands formed part of "Twelve nadas / lands," where Tamil people were having connections. As Cheranadu had some problems with these islands or both colluded with each other against the Cholas, Rajaraja had to invade and check them². The number 12,000 could not have been mentioned arbitrarily without any traditional basis and continuous popular usage. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri hinted about this in the footnote, though, not elaborated. Therefore, when, those references are verified, interesting details are obtained and they are taken up for discussion as follows.

Maldivian magic number 12,000 and Rajaraja's 12,000 ancient islands: Maldives had been visited by many people and evidently populated by the Indian dynasties. Researchers claim that the settlement of people was going on by the people coming from Kalinbangan, Ganges, Kalinga, South India and Sri Lanka³. After the Mohammedan conquest and Islamization, not only the pre-Islamic monuments were disappearing, but, the culture was also changed. Yet, some old past memories are reflected through Cowries and Cowrie related practices, counting and astrology⁴. The Maldivians evidently continued their tradition of "Magic with numbers" and connecting them with the cowries⁵. The title of the Sultan as given by Pyrard⁶ and evidently an ancient formula, shows the two systems in competition. He was called "Sultan of 12,000 islands and 13 atolls," the words being 'dolos assa ra' (= 12,000 lands) and tera atholom (=13 atolls)⁷. John of Montecorvino, in a letter dated December 22nd 1292 wrote⁸, "*The state of things in regard to the Sea of India is this Traversing it towards the South there is no continent found but islands alone, but in that sea the islands are many, more than 12,000 in number.....the traditional Madive number,*

12,000." Duarte Barbosa, a Portuguese sailor noted⁹, "The Islands Maldio – Over against this land of further Malabar (Cape Comorin) forty leagues off, lies an archipelago of islands, said by the moors to number 12,000."

The 12,000 of the Moors and "panirayiram," of the Cholas were one and the same: As the inscriptions of Rajaraja and the Moors referred to the islands as 12,000 in word and numbers, it is evident that both referred to Malattivu / Maldives only. In other words, the stone cutter incised, the poet dictated, the ruler ordered and others knew that the islands were known as 12,000. The Moors (Arabs as sailors, traders, pirates etc) knew it as 12,000. Thus, it is evident that from workers to King, 12,000 was so popular referring to Maldives during the 10th-11th centuries. When the writings of the

European and the Arab explorers, sailors and mariners are taken as historical truth, it is surprising and intriguing for historians and researchers to doubt the Cholas inscriptions referring to the Maldives as 12,000. Therefore, the Cholas inscriptions have consciously recorded the contemporary history carefully and faithfully on the rocks / inscriptions and metal / copper plates. Unless, researchers take all facts into considerations, their interpretations might mislead others and historical writings are also get affected.

Whether Rajendra invaded Maldives or not?: K. A. Nilakanta Sastri after dealing with Rajendra's exploits of the Chera Nadu¹⁰ doubted about one island 'Sandiamattivu', the details are given as follows:

தெண்டிரை யீழ மண்டல முழுவதும் எறிபடைக் கேரளன் முறைமையிற் குடும் குலதன மாகிய பலர்புகழ் முடியும் செங்கதிர் மாலையும் சங்கதிர் வேலைத் தொல்பெருங்காவற் பல்பழந் தீவும் செருவிற் சினவி யிருப தொருகால் அரக்களை கட்ட பரகராமன் மேவருஞ் சாந்திமத்தீவரன் கருதி இருத்திய செம்பொற் நிருந்தகு முடியும்	In his sixth year, A. D. 1018, Rajendra seized the heirloom of the Kerala monarch including the crown praised by many and rightfully worn by him, and the garland emitting red rays. He also took the 'many ancient islands, whose old, great guard was the ocean which makes the conches resound.' In the next year, he captured the crown of pure gold worthy of Tiru (Laksmi) that had been deposited in Sandimattivu, in view of its strong fortress, by Parasurama who, roused in war, had uprooted the kings (of the world) twenty-one times.
---	--

As he could not locate 'Sandiamattivu,' he suspected that he might not have invaded Maldievs or any other island¹¹, "It may be doubted if by this campaign Rajendra added any new territory to his dominions. Rajaraja had conquered the Pandya and Kerala countries very early in his reign and 'the many ancient islands' towards its end. These islands were the Maldives; the obscure new Sandimattivu of legendary fame is apparently to be sought also among the islands of the Arabian Sea." However, in footnote, he mentioned that, "Sengathir-malai" may be taken more literally and so also Sandimattivu¹² (than actual military campaign). Here 'Sandimattivu' created doubt, as he thought, it was a myth. However, he continued to point out how the Cholas gained control over Maldives, the strategic point¹³, "The Colas only continued an ancient tradition in the attention they gave to developing their power on the sea. The conquest of Ceylon and the

Maldives, and the evidence of the Chinese annals on the embassies that reached China in this period from the Cola country give us some measure of the success they attained in this direction. And the overthrow of the Cera fleet at Kandalur Salai may well be taken to mark the definite establishment of Cola naval power in this period in the territorial waters of Southern India". Immediately, after this, he acknowledged the conquest of Maldives, but, doubting the narrative of Sulaiman.

Sandimattivu – Legendary island or reality?: Here, the following crucial expressions are important for interpretation.

1. தெண்டிரை யீழ மண்டல முழுவதும் = the whole of southern Ezha zone (Ceylon)
2. செங்கதிர் மலை = the evening with reddish light
3. சங்கதிர் வேலை = the conch sounding time

4. தொல்பெருங்காவற் பல்பழந் தீவும் = many ancient islands protected by big security / army
5. மேவருஞ் சாந்திமத்தீவரண் = further, after crossing comes the island Sandimattive with walls or well-protected place.

If the order is followed, after the whole of southern Ezha zone (Ceylon), many ancient islands protected by big security / army can be reached, where the evenings would be with reddish light and the morning with the conch sounding and further, after crossing them comes the island Sandimattive with walls or well-protected place or it could be one of the islands. Indian astronomical works repeatedly mention four cities situated on zero latitude or equator, as "Sunrise at Lanka is sunset at Siddhapura, midday at Yavakoti and midnight at Romaka." Here, it is easy to know that the Ceylon or present Sri Lanka is not on the equator, but, 12,000-Maldives. Thus the expressions 'Sandimattivu, Sengathir-malai' suits with Maldives, as they connote to a place 'an island associated with santhi' i.e, the meeting points of dawn-midday-dusk-midnight and 'an evening, where Sun rise / set making it red.' Thus, Sangamattivu could be located on equator as one of the Maldivian islands.

Sandimattivu, where the Gold Crown was deposited: Sastri doubted 'Sandimattivu,' as the pure gold crown was deposited there. From the Maldivian narratives, it known that the queen always wore gold ornaments. As the Cheras were troubling him, Rajaraja Invaded 'Kanthalursalai' of the Cheras and taught them a lesson. Thus, the logical further movement of the Cholas should be Lakshawadwip islands and then to 12,000 ancient islands of three Oceans. That a Maldivian queen or wife of a ruler wore gold crown, dress, chappal etc., is known from the account of Edrisi¹⁴, "His wife administers justice, and speaks in public unveiled, after an established custom from which they never vary. The name of this queen is Demhera; she wears for ornaments a robe of gold tissue, and on her head a crown of the same metal, enriched with pearls and precious stones. She wears gold slippers, such as none other may use under pain of having their feet cut off". Thus, the Maldivian queen used to wear Gold crown, dress and chappal and therefore,

the Moors, Mohammedan pirates or the islanders might have carried away during a naval fight from the Chola / Chera ship. The narrative that it was deposited in the Sandimattivu, was used in the inscription figuratively, as loss and gain were so common in piracy and maritime related fights. That in 1017, Rajendra brought it back proves he wanted to achieve the traditional title of "Mummdi Chola" = Cola with three crowns, i.e, the Victor of three crowns or three Kings of different dynasties¹⁵.

The Boatbuilding in Maldives and South India: The Arab merchant Sulaiman made his curious account of Maldives, in which, he says that the people of these islands '*built ships and houses and executed all other works with a consummate art*'¹⁶, though never visited the Coromandel coast and his voyages were made before Vijayalaya (846-881). Yet, taking Sulaiman's testimony to the quality of the ships built in Maldives, into account and the conquest of these islands effected by Rajaraja's fleet, the efficiency of Chola navy could be understood during 10th-12th centuries. Abu Zaid Hasan, adding to Sulaiman's work about the beginning of the 10th cent. CE, observed that the vessels of the Indian ocean, specially those made at Saraf, differed in construction from those of the Mediterranean. '*It is a fact that the type of ship built by pieces of wood sewn together is a specialty of the builders of Siraf, the ship builders of Syria and of Rum (Byzantium) nail, on the contrary, these pieces of wood and never sew them one to another*'¹⁷. Al Idrisi's description of Maldivian shipbuilding, is quoted by all as usual as follows¹⁸: "*All travelling boats of the Sea of India and China are constructed of well-hewn wood. These planks are put edge to edge and trimmed, and then sewn with fine fibre. Then they were caulked with the small intestines and the oil of al-baba (the sperm whale).*" In 1292 CE, Marco Polo¹⁹ described Indian ships as "*built of fir timber, having a sheath of boards laid over the planking in every part, caulked with iron nails. The bottoms were smeared with a preparation of quicklime and hemp, pounded together and mixed with oil from a certain tree which is a better material than pitch.*" Friar Oddoric of Pordenane, an Italian monk in 14th century also credited Indian ship with a carrying capacity of over 700 people, thus, appreciating both ship building

skills and maritime ability of Indian shipbuilders who could produce such large tonnage vessels. Thus, it is evident that the Western Coast of India down to Cheranadu, the islands of Laccadives, Sri Lanka and Maldives had such shipbuilding facilities and the Cholas depended upon them.

Terminology used for boats and ships, and boat-shipbuilding proves the common practices followed: Even today, the boats on the Malabar Coast were manufactured with planks 'sewn' together by threads of cocoanut fibre, but these are usually of a small size. If the observations of Abu Zaid based on what he saw and heard at Siraf about 916 CE on navigation in the Indian Ocean²⁰ and Marco Polo observed much later, it cannot be argued that there were no contemporary evidences for

the shipbuilding carried on the Coromandel Coast under the Cholas. Ahmad-ibn Majid, an Arab writer of the 15th century and author of several nautical works, makes frequent references to the Cholas²¹. The English translation is given for convenience, *"In all his nautical works, Ibn Majid frequently refers to the opinion of the Cholas he approves or rectifies. He was to have at his disposal the Nautical Inscriptions, geographical tables, indicating the latitude of the ports, used by the sailors of Coromandel, and comparing them with Arab documents of the same nature."* Therefore, he must have had before him a specialised nautical literature of Tamil (Chola) origin which he compared with Arab documents of a like nature. The Maldives boatbuilding is known as dhoni banun (making or manufacture of boats)²². The different types of boats built are known as:

Bokkura – Row boat. Mas odi – Square-sailed fishing craft. Mas dhoani – fishing vessel. Ban'du odi - Schooner Naalu Bathteli – inter-island freighter Vadhu dhoani – Troll boat. Jaha dhoani – Royal transfer boat.	In Indian languages, Padava / Padagu, Oda / Odam, thoni / dhoni, etc., have been very common. These boats have been modifications of the same hull. The names have been typically Indian with mixed words. However, Maldivians accept that the big boats or larger vessels built in India are known as "naus".
--	---

Therefore, it is evident that the *"Nautical Inscriptions, geographical tables, indicating the latitude of the ports, used by the sailors of Coromandel"* were available and later, the Europeans and the Arabs might have destroyed to suppress the shipbuilding technology of the Cholas. As otherwise, the Cholas would not have produced such data for navigation and gone to SEA islands to conquer Srivijaya. About the Chola Royal astronomer, Suyadeva Yajvan, discussion has been made separately²³.

Maldivian local tradition of the Cholas invading and getting defeated later: Based on local narratives, Naseema Mohammed²⁴ pointed out that *"Legend speaks of the Indian ruler Raja Dada (Rajaraja) who had captured the two northern-most atolls, Malikatholhu (present-day Minicoy) and Thiladummathi. This invasion is said to have taken place during the early years of the Soma Vansa Dynasty, possibly during the early 11th century AD. This part of*

the legend is corroborated by the inscriptions of the Chola Emperor Rajaraja (985-1014 AD) which claim control over the Laccadive-Maldives archipelago (Ragupathy 1994:3). The Soma Vansa ruler King Mahaabarana Adeettiya (1121-1142 AD) ascended the throne after he defeated the Indians who had occupied these two atolls. After this victory he was named "the ruler of fourteen atolls and two thousand islands". His kingdom of Deeva Mahal was the territory that lay between Malikaddu (Minicoy) and Addu Atoll (Shihabuddine c. 1650-1687). According to this source (Kitab fi Athaari Meedoo el-Qadimiyyeh by Allama Ahmed Shihabuddine relating from the Maapanansa copper plates), Koimala or King Mahaabarana Adeettiya was succeeded by his nephew Sri Sandaneyka Buvana Adeettiya (Tribuvana Adeettiya). This was the famous Darumavantha Radun (Shihabuddine c. 1650-1687) and during this king's reign, Maldives converted to

Islam in 1153 AD". This is discussed with the Koimala myth of the Maldives as follows.

Evolution of Koimala myth during medieval period: There have been different narratives about an Indian Prince coming to Maldives coming from different parts of India, settling down, and becoming rulers.

1. Form Malabar: One narrative noted that In 1117 CE, Koimala, a Malabar of noble decent, landed on the Maldives. Though, he went with his entourage of followers and family, they were invited by the islanders of Rasgetheemu in North Maalhosmadulu Atoll. Having settled down, later he fought and beat the Cholas who had control over Maldives at that time and the country and unified under one leader for the first time in recorded history.
2. From India: According to Maldivian Folklore, Koimala was an Indian prince who arrived in Malé Atoll, was welcomed by the Maldivian people. They allowed him to settle. Trees were planted on the sandbank and thus the papaya tree was first grown there. As time passed, the Maldivians accepted him he became ruler of Maa-le (Malé) and Hulhu-le (Hulhulé) with a palace built for him.
3. From Simhala / Ceylon: Another version claims Koimala was a Sinhalese prince married the Ceylon king's daughter, made a voyage in two vessels from Ceylon and reached the Maldives. The Maldivian Buddhists, learning that the visitors were of royal descent from the Buddhist kingdom of Ceylon, invited them to remain and ultimately proclaimed Koimala their king at Rasgetheemu. Both migrated to Malé and settled there with the consent of the aborigines of Giraavaru - then the most important community of Malé Atoll. After the settlement in Malé, two vessels were dispatched to bring more people of his race to populate Malé.
4. From Kalinga: Yet no other narratives describe that a prince might actually be a corruption of the stories of King Soorudasaruna-Adeettiya and King Balaadeettiya- both exiled princes from the Kalinga Kingdom of India who founded the

Solar and Lunar Dynasties of the Maldives. According to this source, Kitab fi Athaari Meedoo el-Qadimiyyeh by Allama Ahmed Shihabuddine relating from The Maapanansa copper plates, Koimala or Siri Mahaabarana, the son of King Siri Bovana Aananda was the fourth king of the Lunar Dynasty and uncle to King Dhovemi (Siri Bavana-adiththa) the first Sultan (Muslim king) of the Maldives.

5. From Choladesa, Rajadada: Koimala became the King of the 14 atolls and two thousand islands of the Dheeva Mahal and his kingdom was referred to as Malikaddu dhemedhu- or 'all islands lay between the Maliku and Addu. He fought against the Raja Dada's (or the forces of the Tamil emperor Raja Raja Chola I of the Chola empire) Indians to claim the two northern most atolls for the newly formed Maldivian kingdom. Koimala was succeeded by his nephew Dhovemi Kalaminja in 1141.

Decoding Koimala myth in the Kalinga-Chola Maritime context:

After the careful reading of the above Maldivian stories and narratives and in the historical perspective and context, the following decoded interpretations are presented:

1. As Buddhism was introduced into Sri Lanka / Ceylon by Mahendra /Mahinda and Sangamitra / Sngamitta, son and daughter of Asoka (304-232 BCE), it was introduced in the Maldives by a man-woman pair.
2. Buddhism was there in the Maldives since 3rd cent.BCE and Hindu religion might have also come through the traders.
3. Thus both lived together till 12th cent CE, however, Buddhism dominated, as their strength was more. The Vajrayana practices followed prove the fact.
4. During Rajaraja period, the Hindu-Saiva group dominated and hence a Siva temple was built there, as is evident from the archaeological evidences²⁵.
5. That Kalinga prince as a Buddhist or converting to Islam and defeating Rajaraja or his army kept there reveal the Kalinga-Chola enmity or victory-defeat syndrome

is revealed in the Kalinga, Sri Lankan and the Maldivian contexts.

6. The conversion of Solar dynasty to Lunar dynasty shows the implication of Buddhists and Hindus getting converted to Islam.
7. If the Sun-worship account²⁶ existed there is taken into account, this Solar-Lunar conversion vouchsafe the Indian astronomical tradition of locating Lanka on zero latitude, here, on the Maldives.

Chola period bronze lamp, bowl and other metallic objects found at Maldives islands:

Several other objects with a likely South Asian provenance include a bronze lamp of the Chola period style (ninth to eleventh century CE), silver and gold ring foils, a terracotta ram figure from India and varied bead types including those manufactured from clay, glass, shell, coral, carnelian, agate and quartz were found during excavations at different sites (Skjolsvold 1991; Bopardikar 1992; Mikkelsen 2000).

- Chola period Lamp: Bopardikar pointed out that the lamp was Cholas and the ceramics too could have come from India or Sri Lanka²⁷.
- Pieces of bronze bowl, parts like lid and figments: About the tortoise skeletons found at the Kasshidhoo, Mikkelsen observed²⁸, ".....*The finds from the filling of this chamber consisted of one plastered piece with traces of red paint, one cowrie shell and small pieces of a bronze bowl. More bronze figments and as well as parts of the probable lid were found outside....*"
- A number of gold or brass ornamented discs: J. Stanley Gardiner, who had led a scientific expedition to Maldives and neighbouring Laccadives in 1900, and who identified 'the remains of dagobas' in Foh Mulah Atoll, as well as in Haddunmati Atoll, Gamu Island; South Miladunmadulu Atoll, Landu Island; South Miladunmadulu Atoll, Miladu Island; and (less specifically), in Suvadiva and Addu Atolls. Gardiner, writing in 1900, further commented²⁹: "*Ghang (Gamu) in Haddunmati was evidently a great religious centre, having ruins of fourteen of these (mounds), some with smoothed sides of square stone. One in Landu appears to have had a kind of pit*

or well in the centre, formed by square blocks of porites and covered by two large flat masses. Within this in 1848 were found a number of gold or brass ornamented discs."

- A silver-metal box, two badly-rusted silver-metal plates and two coins: At Toddu island, besides, the Buddha sculpture, the excavators also uncovered a coral relic-casket (M. Kuradi; cf. Sin. Karanduva) which contained a silver-metal box, two badly-rusted silver-metal plates which appeared to bear seals, two coins, and a smaller gold-metal box containing what appeared to be a gold-metal amulet. The coins, which were described by Muhammad Ismail Didi as bearing the figures of deer or horses ... and on the other side a head ... were subsequently lost³⁰.
- Two bronze statues – Buddha and Apsara: Metal figures discovered at Haddunmati Atoll, Gādū Island, in October, 1970. On October 10, 1970, construction work on the island of Gādū in the south-central Haddunmati led to the chance discovery of two bronze-metal statues which had been buried together in a jar. The statues, which are only a few centimetres high, are now preserved in the National Museum in Male. One figure (Male Museum No. 21) represents a sedent Buddha with legs crossed in the lotus position; the facial features and robe are rather crudely executed. The style is typically Sri Lankan, and may be approximately dated to the 9th or 10th centuries CE. The second figure (Male Museum No. 22) is in a worse state of preservation, but may represent an apsara or female semi-divinity; in style the figurine has a certain Malayo-Indonesian quality.

Destruction of Hindu temples, images etc – Linga found and destroyed: By going through the researches of archaeological excavations conducted at the Maldivian islands, many pallas, omphalo and linga type sculptures have been recovered, recorded and destroyed also. The details available are listed as follows:

1. The Dutch archaeologists pointed out that the Maldivian archaeological team discovered a carved coral liṅga 36.75

cms. long, with a circumference of 30.5 cms at the base. Unfortunately, as with the Toddu Buddha figure and coins, the Ariadu liṅga was either broken up, or thrown into the sea, or otherwise misappropriated or lost. Who did such vandalism or destroyed the evidences has not been mentioned. Two photographs of the liṅga survive, however, and from these it has been possible definitely to establish the nature of the artefact.

2. M. Ismail Didi's excavations at Ariadu were thus unique in being the first to unearth a religious artefact of specifically Hindu origin - though what the Ariadu liṅga was doing in close proximity to what were apparently a series of three Buddhist stupas remains uncertain³¹. In other words the Buddhists would not have had lingam in their caityas or viharas, hence, a temple must have existed and it must have been destroyed by the Buddhists, when they became dominant.
3. Relying upon Mohammed Amin et al³², many researchers have pointed out that Lingas were found in many islands of Maldives.
4. Graham Hancock³³, noted, *"Interestingly, large numbers of 'phallic' sculptures have been recovered in archaeological excavations in the Maldives – for example amid the ruins of a vast temple complex in North Nilandhoo Atoll. I was able to study a collection of such objects from different parts of the archipelago and in my opinion, despite some idiosyncrasies, they are nothing more nor less than Sivalinga"*.
5. A significant find came to light was the accidental discovery of four carved coral heads depicting aggressive fanged faces in Male', which were unearthed during construction in 1962. Two of these were deposited in the National Museum and survived there until their destruction by extremists in 2012 (Forbes 1987:286; Bajaj 2012).
6. Two of the coral heads were also reported to be four-sided *siva linga* and there was also some indication that symbols

associated with Siva are depicted on one of the coral stones (Forbes 1987:286).

7. An amateur archaeological expedition was undertaken by a Maldivian team in February 1959, to Ariadhoo island in Ari Atoll found a carved coral phallus (linga), 15 inches in height and 12 inches in circumference at the base³⁴.

Hindu style Mihrab assembly made of marbles

found: The demolition and reconstruction work at "Machchangoli Ba Miskit" (Machchangli Old Mosque) in 1983, just to the south of Majidi Magu in central Male, had resulted in the discovery of a series of carved marble stones, which, when assembled, bear a strikingly Hindu appearance, though apparently once used for a Muslim mihrab³⁵ or sanctum sanctorum or Garbagruha. Forbes concluded that the Mangrol Jami Masjid mihrab may have been taken from an earlier Hindu structure, or - perhaps more probably - made by Hindu craftsmen after a Hindu style in the typical white marble of western India or marble does not occur naturally in the Maldives, and therefore the artefacts in question must have been imported³⁶. However, how they were brought from the western India and by whom and such other details are not given. As the Cholas had gone and there had been evidences for the existence of a temple with linga and all, even, the Cholas could have brought them there, as a Siva-Vishnu temple with many sculptures was constructed at Quanzhou, China. Thus, the possibility is that the Cholas could have built a Siva temple and it must have been destroyed by the iconoclast radicals. Moreover, Hindu style mihrab has not been orthodox, but, it is found as Qibla put on inside a Hindu temple converted into mosque with the inner structure kept in tact at many places. Therefore, Hindu like mihrab in the Maldives is not all surprising, as such pattern is found in the mosques of Kelaa, HA atoll; Nohlivaram, HDh; Meedhu, R atoll; Male, K atoll etc.

Usthumbu, Stupa structure, tortoise sacrifice:

The findings of Thor Heyerdahl, Arne Skjølsvold and Egil Mikkelsen have brought out the remains of a temple, Rakshasa-like sculptures with Pallava-type inscription. The local Maldivian people arrange shells in such a way, they look like a stupa - ruined miniatures

of satihirutalu which formed the apex of the Maldivian Buddhist usthumbu. The usthumbu has three parts: the quadrangular base representing earth; the bell-shaped middle part, representing water; and the satihirutalu representing air which crowns the usthumbu. The pagoda spire with lotus base of the stupa has striking resemblance with the material evidence and also that of Manimekhalai description³⁷. Therefore, the connection of Pallavas and Colas with these areas is very visible. About the tortoise skeletons found at the Kassidhoo, Mekkelson observed³⁸, ".....The finds from the filling of this chamber consisted of one plastered piece with traces of red paint, one cowrie shell and small pieces of a bronze bowl. More bronze fragments and as well as parts of the probable lid were found outside. There was an extension to south of this structure. Huge amounts of animal bones were found on top of this, obviously traces of sacrificial ceremonies. These bones have been analysed by Dr. Leif Jonsson, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Most surprisingly, they were determined as coming from giant tortoise (*Aldabrachelys elephantina*) a species never previously encountered in the Maldives. Bones of small terrestrial turtle and sea turtle were also found on and around ruim (fig.16). The Buddhist monks kept in their temples for religious is well known....." but he has not given the "well known reasons.....they have been dated to AD 725-885..." However, he has not explained the significance. As pointed out, the pyramid structure with geometrical shapes associate with Buddhist stupa and as well as Sri Chakra and Mahaneru. Again, in structural design, the Meru is placed on the tortoise. That the Cholas were interested in the tantric practices have been dealt with separately³⁹. It proves that Vajrayana Buddhism and astronomical studies were carried on there.

Vajrayana Buddhism and Hindu "mantra-yantra-mantra" practices followed in Maldives: Regarding human sacrifices in early Maldives, Romero-Frias noted⁴⁰ that, "*Blood sacrifices, and even human sacrifices, were indeed a feature of Dravidian Devi worship. In South India even to this day, bloody ceremonies including animal sacrifices and nightly processions with lights are still part of the worship of goddess Mari. It is very likely that Buddhism, upon its arrival in Maldives, sought*

to stop human sacrificial offerings offered to the ancestral Goddess, so common throughout Dravidian village India. The readiness to offer these sacrifices can be traced to the extreme fear Maldivians had of epidemics and diseases in general". Evidently, he was confused with the sacrifices of Hindu and Buddhist practices. Jost Gippert has exhaustively dealt with the subject matter based on the study of Prakrit and Sanskrit inscriptions found there in the Maldives⁴¹. The inscriptions have been found typically on the sculptures representing as Rakshas. Of course, the mantras mention pretas, pisacas, khumbandas, rakshasas etc. He mentions them typically as Vajrayana inscriptions, Vajrayana Buddhist inscriptions, Vajrayana statues, in his works⁴². He concludes characteristically and ironically as follows⁴³, "*Two inscribed statues now destroyed, of Male Museum preserved the mantra used for the invocation of Yamantaka, the head of the "Kings of Wrath" (Krodharajan) of Tantric Buddhism. The text represented by the inscriptions is by and large as the one contained in the Guhyasamajatantra and the Majusrimukalpa, with a slightly closer affinity to the former where the versions diverge.*"

Decoding the story of Rannamaari: According to Maldivian scholars two narratives of "Rannamaari story, existed in Maldives based on the Dhanbidhu Lomafanu copperplates dating from 1193 CE⁴⁴. In the first one, a virgin was left in the temple, Rannamaari emerged from the sea, but cried out in pain, the moment Quran was recited, and it disappeared by jumping into the sea. The next morning, when people came to collect the body of the girl for burial, they found that the girl from North Africa was alive without any molestation. In second version, Al-Barbai, the visiting trader had challenged the ruler that he would win the Rannamaari and if it happened, then, the king and all the subjects should get converted to Islam. Accordingly, the king having accepted, Al-Barbari went to temple donning as a girl, but, when he overpowered and captured, he found that it was nothing but the king, who, with the collusion of temple priests and courtiers, used this modus operandi to satisfy his violent lust and keep his subjects in fear. In short, it could be understood as a story floated to justify the imposition of Islam on the Maldivian people with the destruction of temples, caityas etc,

thereafter in 12th-13th centuries. Romero Frias noted that its structure is also similar to a story of Panchatatra⁴⁵, "The structure of this legend – the killing of the girls, the role of a book, etc.– is identical in the *Nandapakarana* story of the *Panchatantra*. See Finot, *Recherches sur la Litterature Laotienne*" and "Even the legend of the virgin and the sea monster told in the context of the conversion of the islands to Islam originated in the *Panchatantra*."

Archaeological evidences disappearing from Maldives:

Interestingly, the Maldivian copperplates have recorded as to how the Caityas, Buddha statues etc., built by kafirs were demolished and destroyed in 1153. The Dhanbidhū Lōmāfānu⁴⁶ [Maldivian copper plates] tells us that the Satihirutalu (the chattravali or chattrayashti crowning a stupa) were broken to disfigure the numerous stupas. It tells us also that statues of Vairocana, the transcendent Buddha of the middle world region, were destroyed [by destroying on all islands hold (lit. received) by himself that are between Kela and Addū, the (Buddhist) monasteries founded (lit. made) by the former infidel kings, the Buddha temples (and) the Vairocana (statues) ...]⁴⁷; Ironically, the copper plates were issued by the King Mahabarana, and the destruction was not limited to sculptures. This vandalization continued thereafter also. The wealth of manuscripts probably written on screwpine leaves that Maldivian monks in their Buddhist monasteries must have produced was either burnt or otherwise so thoroughly eliminated that it has disappeared without leaving any trace⁴⁸. Therefore, there are no samples of paintings from the Maldivian Buddhist period itself. The only actual remains of the art of those times are a few sculptures and etchings on coral stone. Most of these were preserved in a little room in the Malé Museum, but many they were not properly labelled, so it was not easy to know where they come from. A Buddha head found by H.C.P. Bell during his excavations in this atoll has disappeared, but the picture taken by Bell can be seen in his monograph⁴⁹. This was the position in 1970-80s and in 2000 onwards, the radical iconoclasm increased resulting in the destruction of pre-Islamic archaeological evidences occurred in 2012.

Archaeological evidences destroyed in 2012: In 2012, Islamic radicals entered the National museum of Maldives and destroyed all the so-called pre-Islamic sculptures, manuscripts and other archaeological findings. Nearly 30 Buddhist statues were smashed into pieces beyond repair. As one noted, "Found carefully buried on Thoddu in 1959, this statue had been preserved underground for nearly 800 years. To hide it after Buddhist Maldives was declared an Islamic kingdom by royal decree in 1153, islanders removed the statue from a higher position and placed it upright on the floor of the temple where sand had been spread. It was then surrounded by hewn stone slabs and more sand and rocks. A protective slab was placed over the statue and additional rocks and sand were added to the pile until the temple had become a mound. The heap was then covered in soil," but it was destroyed in 2012. Ali Waheed, Museum director said that typically, two or three artifacts of the country's Buddhist heritage are discovered a year, generally during construction of homes and other buildings, but the fate is well-known.

Conclusion: The study of archaeological evidences a country like Maldives has been difficult because of prevailing political, religious and other reasons and conditions. As important islands, where excavations have been carried on, have now owned by individuals, tourists or researchers with tourist visa cannot enter. Therefore, independent researchers have many problems in visiting places, getting permissions, taking photographs etc. This paper has been prepared with the inputs received from Xavier Romero Frias and Egil Mekkelson. I thank K.Vivekananda Rao, Germany for translating Dutch and German papers into English.

In view of the above discussion, the following specific points are presented as conclusion:

1. The nautical expedition, maritime exploitation and oversea conquests of places, islands and countries as mentioned in the meikirtis / prasastis and claimed by the Cholas can be cross-checked with the contemporary evidences.
2. The expression Pannirayiram-12,000 as mentioned in the inscriptions was also used by the Moors / Arabs in their documents referring to the Maldives and

therefore, the inscriptional reference is an historical evidence of Rajendra invading and conquering the Maldive islands.

3. The expression Sangamattivu and gold crown deposited there and brought back, as mentioned in the inscription also correlated, corroborated and compared with the Arab narratives of the Maldive women and found tallied.
4. The finding of linga, its destruction into pieces and throwing into ocean by the Maldive excavators prove the existence of a Siva temple.
5. The bronze bowl and other metallic object show the influence of the Cholas, as they invaded. The bowl has been specifically noted as belonging to the Chola period.
6. The Ranna-mari legend ritual and the historicity behind them, prove the practice of mantra-tantra-yantra type of practices of Hindus and as well as Buddhists.
7. The Buddhist sacrifices carried out as proven by the archaeological evidences of

skeletons and the mantras found on the inscriptions prove the Vajrayana method of tantric practices followed.

8. That the Maldives were under the control of the Cholas till 1121, then, they were reportedly defeated by the converted King Mahaabarana has been recorded in the Maldivian copperplates.
9. As Rajaraja and Rajendra were consistently erecting victory pillars wherever they conquered just as a token of victory without annexation, in the Maldives also, they must have erected. However, as the radical iconoclasts of all sorts have been destroying the places of worship of non-Muslims for the last more than hundred years, the victory pillar erected might also been destroyed and even thrown in the ocean, as done in the case of linga.
10. If the archaeological and other evidences are destroyed in this manner, the entire past history of the Maldives or any country, maritime trade and other connected subjects would be lost forever.

References

1. கன்னித் தென்கரைக் கடற்பழந்தீபம்
கொல்லங் கூபகஞ் சிங்கன மென்னும்
எல்லையின் புறத்தவும் கன்னடம் வடுகம்
கலிங்கம் தெலுங்கம் கொங்கணற் துளுவம்
குடகங் குன்றம் என்பன குடபால
இருபுறச் சையத்துடனுறைபு கூருந்
தமிழ்திரி நிலங்களும்.....Tolkappiyam
commentary.
Thus, the commentator, Deivaccilaiyar recorded these group of islands with twelve lands, where Tamil or Tamil people were associated.
2. T. V. Sadasiva Pandarattar, *History of Later Cholas*, Part-I, Annamalai University, 1958, pp.120-121.
3. Mohamed Naseema, *Note on the Early History of the Maldives*. In: Archipel, volume 70, 2005. pp. 7-14.
4. The archaeological remains, copper plates, stone inscriptions and local legends vouchsafe the prevalent of mantra-yantra-tantra and Vajrayana practices were going on. Xavier Romero-Frias, *Maldives Ethnography – Scripts and writing*, www.academia.com from here, his papers can be downloaded.
5. As people from Cheranadu migrated to Ceylon, Lakshadwip, Maldives and other islands, their culture, tradition and heritage could be noted from the house construction, dress, script, festivals celebrated etc., and the cowrie, mathematics and astrology are connected in "Prasannam."
6. Albert Gray and H.C.P. Bell (Eds.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, The Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, Vol.I, p.95.
7. Albert Gray and H.C.P. Bell (Eds.), *The Voyage of Francois Pyrard of Laval to the East Indies, The Maldives, the Moluccas and Brazil*, Vol.II, Part-II, Hakluyt Society, London, 1887, pp.419-420.
8. Albert Gray and H.C.P. Bell (Eds.), opt.cit., pp. 433-434
9. Albert Gray and H.C.P. Bell (Eds.), opt.cit., p.477
10. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cholas*, University of Madras, Madras, 1984, p.201
11. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cholas*, p.202
12. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cholas*, fn.28, p.235
13. The Arab merchant Sulaiman made several voyages between China and the Persian Gulf in the ninth century a.CE, at a time when this long distance trade was being carried on very briskly. In his curious account of the Maldives, he says that the people of these islands 'built ships and houses and executed all other works with a consummate art. Sulaiman had no occasion to visit the Coromandel coast; and his voyages were made before the rise of the Cholas of the Vijayalaya line into prominence. Taking into account Sulaiman's testimony to the quality of the ships built in the Maldives, and the conquest of these islands effected by Rajaraja's fleet, we may form some idea of the efficiency of the Cola navy in this period. K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Cholas*, p.459
14. Francois Pyrard, opt.cit., p.431.

15. The Chola inscriptions consistently recorded that whenever, Kings like Kandaradiya (950-957), Rajaraja (985-1014), Rajendra – I (1012-1044), Rajendra – II (1051-1063) conquered three Kings, they were adoned with "Mummudi Chola." Also, certain important cities were also named as "Mummudi Cholamandalam," proving that they were named as such as a token of victory, just like erection of victory pillars, but without annexation.
16. Ferrad, *Voyage*, p.32; Wilson, *Persian Gulf*, pp.57-58 and N.Pelliot casts a doubt on Sulaiman's authorship of the work attributed to him, T'oung Pao, xxi, pp. 401-402.
17. Ferrad, op.cit., p.93. See also Renadout-Ancient Accounts- Remarek 'E', and Marco Polo.
18. P. a. Jaubert 1836-40, *Geographie d'Ildrisi*, Vls. 1 2, Paris.
19. <http://www.iips.org/Roy-paper.pdf>
20. Ferrand, *Voyage*, p.14.
21. 'Dans tous ses ouvrages nautiques, Ibn Majid fait frequemment allusion'a l' opinion des Colas qu'il approuve ou rectifie. Ce'st qu'il devait avoir en main les Instrucons nautiques tables geographiques avec indication de la latitude des ports, utilise'es par les marins du Coromandel et qu'il les comparait avec les documents arabes des meme nature'. Ferrand, *Journal Asiatique*, 11:14, (1919), pp.171-172.
22. Naseema Mohammed, *Maldivian Seafaring in the Pre-Portuguese Period*, <http://nclhr.gov.mv/history.php>
23. K. V. Ramakrishna Rao, *A Critical Study of Shipping Technology of the Cholas*, in Commomeration Volume of Prof. M.L.K. Murthy, B. R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 2018, Volume.III, pp.875-898., *The Shipping Technology of Cholas*, PSIHC, Rajapalayam, 2007, pp.336-337.
24. Mohamed Naseema, *Note on the Early History of the Maldives*. In: Archipel, volume 70, 2005, pp. 7-14.
25. Forbes, A. D. W., *A Supposed Hindu liṅga from Ariadu Island, West-Central Maldives*, South Asian Religious Arts Studies Bulletin (London), III (October, 1983), pp. 112-21.
26. According to these reports, the island of Gamu conceals 'a temple for the worship of the sun'- "New Sensational Discoveries by Thor Heyerdahl" (3pp. Maldivian Government information sheet, 1983); cf. supplement to Maldives News Bulletin 57 (December, 1982), 7 pp.
27. Bopardikar B, *Excavations of Pre-Islamic Remains in the Maldives*, *Indian Archaeology*, A Review, 1986-87, p.177.
28. Egil Mikkelsen, *Archaeological excavations of a monastery at Kaashidhoo*, Male, 2000.
29. Gardiner, J. S., 'The Natives of the Maldives', *Proceedings*, Cambridge Philosophical Society, XI (1900), p.20;
30. Forbes, op.cit, p.284.
31. Forbes, A. D. W., *A Supposed Hindu liṅga from Ariadu Island, West-Central Maldives*, South Asian Religious Arts Studies Bulletin (London), III (October, 1983), pp. 112-21.
32. Mohamed Amin, Duncan Willetts, Peter Marshall, *Journey Through the Maldives*, 16, Camerapix Publishers International, Nairobi, Kenya, 1992.
33. Graham Hancock (ed), *Underworld – The Mysterious origin of Civilization*, Three Rivers Press, New York, version.2, 2002
34. Maniku, H.A. 1993. *Archaeology in Maldives: An Historical Survey*. Paper presented at the South Asian Archaeological Congress. Male'.
35. Mihrab is a semicircular niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the qibla; that is, the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca and hence the direction that Muslims should face when praying. The wall in which a mihrab appears is thus the "qibla wall"
36. Forbes, op.cit, p.288.
37. Manimekhalai, a post-Tamil Sangam literary work describes a structure at Cakravalakottam that resembles that of Mehru or Stupa with layers of specific geometrical shapes like triangles, hexagon, squares and circles. Incidentally, Rajaraja and Rajendra adopted and adapted such design in building their famous temples at Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram.
38. Egil Mikkelsen, *Archaeological excavations of a monastery at Kaashidhoo*, Male, 2000, p.17.
39. K. V. Ramakrishna Rao, *Rajendra Chola's expedition: Northern conquest or Astronomical pursuit?*, PSIHC, 2012, Chennai, pp.172-177.
40. Xavier Romero-Frias, *The Maldivian Islanders, A Study of the Popular Culture of an Ancient Ocean Kingdom*, Barcelona 1999.
41. Jost Gippert, *A Glimpse into the Buddhist Past of the Maldives – An Early Prakrit Inscription*, in *Vienna Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol.48, 2004, pp. 81-109.
42. Jost Gippert, *A Glimpse into the Buddhist Past of the Maldives – Two Sanskrit Inscriptions*, in *Vienna Journal of South Asian Studies*, 2013-14, Vol.55, pp. 111–144.
43. Ibid, p.133
44. According to Ibn Batuta's version of the story, Rannamaari, a sea demon, haunted the people of the Maldives and had to be appeased monthly with the sacrifice of a virgin girl. On the last day of every month, a lot was drawn by the authority of the king, among the women of the island. She was to be sent off to spend the night in a temple. Overnight, the demon was to come. The following morning, the girls were found dead, and the islanders proceed with the burial rituals.
45. Emmanuel Cosquin, *Études folkloriques, recherches sur les migrations des contes populaires et leur point de départ*, Paris, 1922, pp. 301–304.
46. Ali Najeeb, *Dambidū Lōmāfānu*. Council for Linguistic and Historical Research. Male 2001.
47. Jost Gippert, *An unusual account of the Mi' rāj'*, *Veröffentlichungen der Societas Uralo-Altaica*, 87, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015, p. 169, 175, 176.
48. Xavier Romero-Frias, *The Maldivian Islanders, A Study of the Popular Culture of an Ancient Ocean Kingdom*, Barcelona 1999.
49. Ibid, referring to HCP bell's book. Bell, Harry Charles Purvis. *The Maldivian Islands: Monograph on the history, archaeology, and epigraphy*. Ceylon Government Press, 1940.